

INVITING THE SEEKERS

There are, of course, many ways of teaching, and each believer should follow the methods to which he feels best suited. The important matter is not so much the method but the enthusiasm, effectiveness and devotion with which the teaching work is carried on.

(From a memorandum of the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre, 16 December 1976)

Through the potency of the Name of the Best Beloved, invite thou the receptive souls unto God's holy court, that perchance they may not remain deprived of the heavenly Fountain of living water. He is in truth the Gracious, the Forgiving.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Page: 236/237)

Inviting people to embrace the Cause requires courage, but Bahá'u'lláh has assured us that, "The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God and steadfastness in His Love." [Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Page: 156]

Action both on the part of the teacher and on the part of the seeker seems to be a necessary aspect of the conversion process as "... our duty" as definitely stated by Bahá'u'lláh, "is to show them the right track, invite them to tread it, tell them of the glorious place it leads to, and then, leave them to their own judgement." [From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, 24 December 1925]

(From a letter of the International Teaching Centre to all Counsellors, 9 July 1992)

The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws and principles of the faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

(From a message from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 13 July 1964)

... As you are aware, the beloved Guardian encouraged early enrollment of new believers upon their declarations, and not the creation of obstacles to their acceptance ... After declaration, follow-up with deepening is imperative, and it may be that some will fall away. However those who remain are the true fruits of the teaching endeavour and may include persons of great merit who might have been lost to the Cause through arbitrary early judgements.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 November 1980)

"... he feels that the friends should be very careful not to place hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the Faith. If we make the requirements too rigorous, we will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The

essential thing is that the candidate for enrollment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all the teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it. The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question.

He feels sure that your Assembly is capable of carrying on its work in this spirit, and of fanning the hearts to flame through the fire of the love of God, rather than putting out the first sparks with buckets-full of administrative information and regulations.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, 9 July 1957)

The Guardian fully shares your view that it would be most unwise, and unfair to those who apply for membership in the Community, to require that they should at first accept all the laws of the Faith. Such a requirement would be impossible to carry out as there are many laws in the "Aqdas" with which even the well-confirmed and long-standing believers are not yet familiar. As you rightly point out the process of becoming a Bahá'í is an evolutionary one, and requires considerable time, and sustained effort on the part of the new believer. Such questions as the withdrawal from Church membership and that of abstention from alcoholic liquors should not be thrust upon the newcomer, but explained to him gradually, so that he himself maybe convinced of the truth underlying these ordinances of the Cause.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, 17 February 1938)

You can explain that the acceptance of the Faith by some people for inadequate reasons, or even for ulterior motives, should be understood to be a fact of life; likewise, the fact that some believers, who are at first filled with enthusiasm, later drift into inactivity or leave the Faith. This is not a new experience to mankind but is clearly exemplified by Jesus in the parable of the sower, which appears in St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 13.

The House of Justice has further commented that Bahá'ís cannot be responsible for the condition of the soul of a person who hears the Word. All they can do is to sow the seeds of truth. If a person responds and wishes to be accepted into the community, and the Assembly is reasonably sure that he knows the significance of what he is doing, he should be accepted, and immediate efforts should be exerted to deepen his knowledge of the Faith and involve him in the life of the community ... Of course, an Assembly would not knowingly accept someone whose declaration is insincere, but it should remember that to refuse one sincere person is worse than to accept ten who are insincere and later drift away from the Cause.

To return to the analogy of the sower, the Assemblies must remember that the Bahá'ís have the responsibility not only to sow the seed, but also to water it and to protect the seedlings against pests.

Many a person who initially accepts the Faith for inadequate reasons, later, on deepening his understanding of the teachings, becomes an outstanding Bahá'í. Some

drift away almost immediately. Others remain for a time but later leave the community. This is both their right and their responsibility.

(International Teaching Centre to a Counsellor in Europe, 6 February 1992)

After declaration, the new believers must not be left to their own devices. Through correspondence and dispatch of visitors, through conferences and training courses, these friends must be patiently strengthened and lovingly helped to develop into full Bahá'í maturity. The beloved Guardian referring to the duties of Bahá'í Assemblies in assisting the newly declared believers has written: '... the members of each and every Assembly should endeavour, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer into Bahá'í maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the Teachings'.

(From a message from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 13 July 1964)